The Eye of the Text: Two Short Stories by Edgar Allan Poe

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> We do not see what we love,
> But we love in the hope
> Of confirming the illusion
> That we are indeed seeing
> Anything at all.
>
> Paul de Man

Edgar Allan Poe: this essay addresses death—or, more accurately, that death which is almost never absent in his writings. What, and where, is the presence of death in the literary text? Is there literature worthy of the name that is not irrevocably marked by death? In order to approach these problems, however obliquely, I propose to read two stories Poe was, by his own account, very fond of: "Ligeia" and "The Man that was Used Up".[1] For reasons that will become clear, it is somewhat surprising that this double reading has rarely—if at all—been undertaken.[2] Perhaps the possibility for doing so escaped observation by dint of being excessively obvious (which would only be poetic justice), and while the present reading cannot pretend to undo the resistance typical of such knots of obviousness, it does intend to activate some of the resonances in this puzzling coupling.

The Riddle of Ligeia. "Ligeia," arguably Poe's strongest arabesque, is a jewel of belabored concision which attempts to master the central *topoi* of what is conveniently known as Romanticism with a baroque elegance: love, death, the passionate thirst for knowledge, transgression, the tormented subject, the imagination and the sublime —in some twenty pages it is all woven into a dark and disturbing

tapestry. And if this description courts the parodying paraphrase, this is not a mere coincidence: it is that the text suffers it gladly, positively invites it, and still survives by a sustained exercise in staggering irony, as we shall try to demonstrate.

The story is sufficiently well-known to render superfluous an elaborate plot reconstruction. Still, some notes may be helpful. Already in the first sentence, the narrator firmly establishes the voice of despair resounding throughout the narrative: "I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia." (*M*,310) But meet her he did, then even married her, she got ill, and died, he roamed around aimlessly, eventually took up residence in a dilapidated abbey in one of England's less cheerful regions, got addicted to opium, remarried, "in a moment of mental alienation," "as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine," whom he treats rather badly, and who duly gets afflicted by a mysterious disease as well, and, in turn, after some preternatural goings-on involving a suggestion of poisoning by a third (and spectral) party, dies. During the subsequent wake, her corpse dutifully begins to stir, inaugurating a repetitive "hideous drama of revivification"—until the corpse suddenly rises:

> One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth, into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber, huge masses of dishevelled hair; *it was blacker than the wings of the midnight!* And now slowly opened *the eyes* of the figure which stood before me. "Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the LADY LIGEIA!" (*M*,330)

And with this shriek, the only sentence in the entire text which renders the protagonist's direct speech, the story abruptly breaks off, thus leaving in its wake an enigmatic ellipsis between the last "here" of the story and the undecidable "now" of the narrative act.

"These are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes. . . ." These eyes, returned from the nether world, already formed the protagonist's focus of fascination when his first wife lived for the first time. Ligeia, as the narrator remembers her, was an exceptional woman in every respect, unparalleled in beauty, knowledge, and intelligence; but it was, and is, in her *eyes* that this exclusiveness gathered, in a bewildering and ineffable presence. In her eyes her

lover suspected the "strangeness" of her extraordinariness that continues to haunt the narrator after her death. He desperately struggles to (re)articulate this "strangeness," but fails to move beyond ascribing it to the "*expression*" of these eyes: "Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! . . . What was it—that something deeper than the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What *was* it?" (*M*,313). The answer to this question remains in abeyance throughout, and when Ligeia returns, the same eloquently mute eyes reclaim the scene—the scene of the story as well as that of the narration, for the narrator is incapable of more than a vociferous repetition of his exclamation as a protagonist, and in this quotation fatally deprives himself of speech.

It is, therefore, at this stage that the reader, challenged by "strangeness," is summoned to pursue that strangeness and to articulate it with death. And when we consider the proposals criticism has formulated in this respect, it is interesting to note that most of them, however different the outcome, obey the same logic: the "psyché" of the narrator is equated to that of Poe, and on the basis of that equation, the mystery is solved by locating it in the realm of a universally human, albeit deviant, psychology of relations. In other words, the text is read (not read) as an admittedly distorted but nonetheless recognizable referential report on Poe's (or Man's) problems with women.

Thus, for a classic instance, to Marie Bonaparte it is a clear case that the narrator/Poe was not fascinated by the *expression* but by the *identity* of Ligeia's eyes; and that identity is, as had to be the case, that of Elizabeth Arnold, Poe's mother, who died when he was three. The drama of the passionate thirst for an articulated comprehension of the strangeness of Ligeia's eyes is therefore nothing but the psychodrama of an Oedipal fixation understandably repressed by the author: "For moral inhibitions, in fact, prohibited Poe from recovering the memory of his infantile incestuous wishes towards his mother, with their sado-necrophilist implications."[3]

D. H. Lawrence offers us a second, slightly more subtle example of such a reading. To him, the problem can be boiled down to a symptom of the excessive *libido sciendi* of Poe/the narrator, who wants to conceive of Ligeia in an absolute fashion and fixates this desire upon her eyes. The description of these eyes, Lawrence felicitously remarks, "sounds like an anatomist anatomizing a cat," and he continues that "It is easy to see why each man kills the thing

he loves. To *know* a living thing is to kill it. You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily. For this reason, the desirous consciousness, the SPIRIT, is a vampire."[4] Curiosity killed the cat, is the ultimate message, and this sadistic Schrödinger syndrome is, of course, self-perpetuating: "It is the ghostly Ligeia who pours poison in Rowena's cup. It is the spirit of Ligeia, leagued with the spirit of the husband, that now lusts in the slow destruction of Ligeia. The two vampires, dead wife and living husband."[5]

Lawrence undoubtedly offers a far richer reading of the story, but he, too, ignores its text by mistakenly positing an indivisible trinity of Poe, the narrator-protagonist, and the text, thus rendering invisible the sustained split that constitutes "Ligeia" as literature. A detour through "The Man that was Used Up" will allow us to gauge the import of this mistake more accurately.

The Riddle of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith. About a year after the first version of "Ligeia," Poe wrote the first version of "The Man that was Used Up: A Tale of the Late Bugaboo and Kickapoo Campaign," a grotesque which, as the opening sentence makes only too clear, proposes to establish an intimate relation with its arabesque predecessor: "I cannot just now remember when or where I first made the acquaintance of that truly fine-looking fellow, Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith" (*M*,378). At the same time, of course, this first sentence also marks an important distance in tone between the two stories, in the contrast between the languid "Lady Ligeia" and the jocular "Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith." Whereas "Ligeia" is the poignant story of a tragic passion with mystico-allegorical pretensions, "The Man that was Used Up" appears to be a somewhat superficial exercise that is not without resemblances to the medieval *fabliau*. Still, this difference cannot conceal the asymmetrical specular relation that obtains between both texts and is liable to shed a constructive light on the riddle of Ligeia.

Like "Ligeia," "The Man that was Used Up" is told by an anonymous retrospecting I-narrator. At a point in the past which is further left undefined, a friend of the narrator's spoke to him about the "very remarkable" General Smith, a man who appeared to be a favorite of Philadelphia's women, largely as a consequence of the heroic reputation he had acquired in a swamp-fight with the Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indians. The protagonist anxiously anticipated a full report on these martial exploits, but at the very mo-

ment his friend wants to fill him in, the conversation is interrupted by the General himself, whose superlative physical appearance deeply impresses the protagonist. Smith's "delightfully luminous conversation," singularly concerned with "the rapid march of mechanical invention," temporarily reconciles the protagonist to the deferral of the desired revelation, but also doubles his curiosity. He subsequently decides to inquire among his acquaintances, but soon discovers that this project is rather more difficult than was to be expected. Indeed, the five characters he consecutively approaches, all of them full of praise about Smith, are all interrupted in mid-sentence, always at the same point, on the very verge of revealing the truth of the matter. Fed up with this, the protagonist decides to consult the horse's mouth. Upon his arrival at the General's residence, he learns that the latter is still dressing, but he manages to be admitted to his presence. Upon entering Smith's rooms, he kicks against "an exceedingly odd-looking bundle of something" lying around on the floor. To his amazement, the bundle indignantly protests against this uncivil treatment: the "squeaking nondescript" proves to be the General in person. Or rather, the General in what little is left of his person—those few parts the bloodthirsty savages have not chopped off or otherwise mutilated. With the aid of his valet, the General then commences to reconstruct himself, by means of diverse prostheses, into the impressive figure that had initially fettered the protagonist's interest, meanwhile eloquently praising the qualities of his various appliances. When the General finally stands before his visitor in renewed splendor, the latter sees no further point in staying and duly takes his leave, "with a perfect understanding of the true state of affairs, with a full comprehension of the mystery which had troubled me so long. It was evident. It was a clear case. Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith was the man—was *the man that was used up*" (*M*,389).

The structural parallels between the two stories are clear. In both cases, we encounter an anonymous I-narrator who, as protagonist, wants to discover the key to a mysterious fascination, and in both cases, the suspense is largely carried by a repeated deferral of the revelation. We saw that in "Ligeia" that deferral is permanent, and that criticism consequently felt itself called upon to decipher the riddle on its own. Given the explicit solution in the present text, one could expect that such difficulties would not arise here, but such is not the case. Most critics are, legitimately, dissatisfied

with the narrator's "perfect understanding," and choose, less legitimately, to read the story as a veiled comment on the concrete political, social, cultural, or psychic context it was written in. This context functions as the frame of reference that connects the text with reality and succeeds in explaining it away. A brief survey of a number of these readings may conveniently illustrate this.

The most general interpretations of this type see "The Man that was Used Up" as an incisive satire on a society priding itself upon its technical progress, which is certainly not incorrect, but has little to do with the text's literariness.[6] A second group of critics read the story as a kind of *histoire à clef,* and then exert themselves to convince us that their particular key is the right one. The readings of this type are especially interesting in that they, ironically, are powered by the same identificatory urge that also eggs on the protagonist in his burlesque quest: they, too, wish to reveal Smith's "true identity," albeit that their perfect understandings never quite manage to be so evidently clear. Not that there is a shortage of challengers: General Smith is *in reality* General Winfeld Scott, Vice-President Richard M. Johnson, President Andrew Johnson, General William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, President Martin Van Buren, and, finally, Captain Daniel Mann (who is indeed mentioned in the story, but as someone who is certainly not General Smith).[7] Such dissent among the locksmiths may be amusing, but it does not get us much further, and Marie Bonaparte's psychoanalytical *passe-partout* is also entertaining rather than convincing: to her, General Smith is, it need hardly be said, Poe's father (figure) who, as is only fitting, is deftly deprived of his member by the little Oedipus who, driven by incestuous and sadonecrophilist desires, has written all of Poe's texts without even knowing it.[8] Bonaparte would presumably not be very hard put to explain why one of the likely literary sources of the story is Lesage's *Le Diable boiteux*—and the fact that Lord Byron also limps around somewhere between its lines could only strengthen her in this conviction.

But it is not necessary to decide the identity crisis of this Modern Proteus. What is more important is that so many more or less incompatible answers might make us suspect that there is something wrong with the protagonist's question so avidly mimicked by the critics. And there *is* something wrong with a literary critical question that does not have the patience to consider the questions put by the text itself—questions relative to the literariness of that text,

and not in the first place to its supposed real frame of reference. In what follows, we shall see that such questions indeed figure quite prominently in this "superficial" grotesque.

Derailments. We have seen that the revelation of the General's secret is repeatedly interrupted in the course of the story. This interruption always follows the same pattern: the protagonist's interlocutor announces the revelation—"why, you know, he's the man" —and is then systematically waylaid by an interpellant who abducts the sound pattern /mæn/—*not* the *word*—and subsequently derails the conversation. Such foregrounding of the materiality and arbitrariness of the signifier is more than a side-effect of frivolous paronomasia, for it cannot fail to underscore that it is the very substance through which the General's identity is meant to be mediated that wrenches language away from its destination. Any serious reading of this text has to take this disjunction, between the desire for a controlled representation of identity and the sensitivity to the inevitable excess and (hence) inefficiency of language, into consideration.

For what can it mean that the General is the man that was used up? On a "realistic" level of the fantasy—the level on which the Six Million Dollar Man, too, unproblematically exists—Smith is used up in his clash with the Indians. On the level of political satire, "used up" is employed as a synonym for "taken to bits by the critics" (cf. *M*,377). On the level of the common sense of much contemporary literary criticism, however, the General is used up because he is represented in language—or, rather, repeated attempts to do so are undertaken. How is this?

"John Smith"—it is an improperly common name, in some ways even a commonplace, or a cliché. Nor is it the only cliché in the text: in fact, all the protagonist's informants have recourse to a limited number of the same tired phrases to characterize the General,[9] thereby creating a monotonous hyperrepetitivity which demands some reflecting upon. Clichés are expressions that have become worn-out, or empty, as they say, as a result of an excessive exploitation, which suggests that there was something felicitous in the initial expression that invited repetition, and from this we may infer that the efficiency of an expression stands in a direct ratio to its susceptibility to becoming a cliché, which also means that a focus on the cliché effectively demystifies this initial efficiency as, to use a favourite cliché of Nietzsche's, "eine philosophische My-

thologie." In order to be efficient, the necessary applicability of one expression to an infinite number of different entities has to be bracketed, but such enabling oblivion is precisely what is being prevented by the excessive inscription of traces of former usage in the substance of the cliché'd expression. All this is standard linguistics: the cliché figures as *the* sign of language's eternal and necessary imperfection; it summarizes the bankruptcy of signification as a consequence of over-investment.

The possible implications of this observation for the case of Smith are evident: the General is used up because he is represented and resuscitated by a public discourse consisting of expressions that exemplify the ineluctable absence of the referent in language with a painful, albeit slightly ludicrous, clarity. The text does more, however, than demonstrate this absence through a reconstruction of the void of the commonplace—it also activates its apparent counterpart by explicitly inviting the rampant growth of intertextuality.

A good example here is the second of the six derailments on the /maen/-switch: ' "—why, you know he's the man—" "Man," here broke in Doctor Drummummupp, at the top of his voice . . . "man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live; he cometh up and is cut down like a flower!" ' (*M*,382-3). A first result of this association with the Book of Job (14:1-2) is that "man" as the name of the male member of the human species is exploded to encompass the entire race. The first "man" loses, with its article, its feature (+male), due to the forceful intrusion of the second, capitalized "Man," which goes for women too. "Woman that is born of man" is therefore equally possible, and the function of this explicit, if slightly spurious and certainly over-determined, semantic shift is, again, that it stresses the unreliability of the words composing the text. "Woman," "Man," and "man," moreover, have but a short time to live: they are cut down like a flower—*as* a flower; of language, predictably. Man, represented in language, gets lost in that representation, which is always (but not only) irrecoverably figural, in that it cannot say what it tries to mean.

The omitted sequel to the quotation from Job drifts under the text's surface to the third derailment, which takes place at a performance of *Othello*. "He cometh up and is cut down like a flower, he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not": life is, after all, but a walking shadow, a poor player, etc. ' "Did you ever behold a finer figure?" ' (*M*,383), Miss Miranda Cognoscenti, one of the

subjects-supposed-to-know, asks the protagonist, according to the latter designating Smith, according to herself designating the actor who represents Iago, according to the text designating the figure of speech which tries, but continually fails, to place the referent in the floodlight—spending again what is already spent—after which that figure himself produces the next short-circuit: ' "why, he's the man" "-mandragora / Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world / Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep / Which thou ow'dst yesterday!" ' (*M*,384). And although the first syllable of "mandragora" is probably etymologically unrelated to the "man" preceding it here, the object designated by this word does represent Man: the root of the mandrake indeed bears an uncanny resemblance to a shriveled miniature human body, and in medieval lore it was believed to sprout from the seed of hanged men. In addition, it was common knowledge that when the mandrake was uprooted, it emitted a piercing shriek—and here, too, the eradication takes place to the accompaniment of screams and roars (as well as physical violence).

Is it a mere coincidence that we have been able to skid off on this slightly extravagant excursion at the instigation of a text apparently thematizing the murder of the object in symbolic representation, and which quotes a text in which the deliberate abuse of representation leads to the literal death of the represented? Desdemona is used up in Iago's language; the mandrake —metonymically rhizomatic sign of man—feeds off the life of the hanged; General Smith is drawn and quartered by the language of Miss Cognoscenti and her fellow-(literary)-critics.

This intertextual insubordination is, moreover, not limited to the discourse of the interruptors, for the narrator, too, indulges in a few quotations: ". . . I resolved to prosecute immediate inquiry among my acquaintances touching the Brevet Brigadier himself, and particularly respecting the tremendous events *quorum pars magna fuit,* during the Bugaboo and Kickapoo Campaign" (*M*,382). With this modification of a line from Aeneas's report to Dido (*Aeneid,* II,6), General Smith is deftly grafted onto the Trojan War, a war won by means of quick-tongued deceit and artificial constructs. But in Philadelphia's *demi monde,* it is Aeneas/Smith himself who is hailed as wooden horse, after having been chopped to bits by the fictitious Bugaboos (their name, it would appear, derived from the Middle English for "scarecrow"). The fact that the General's valet introduces his master's artificial palate "with the

knowing air of a horse-jockey" (*M*,388) can hardly come as a surprise now.

The narrator continues: "The first opportunity which presented itself and which (*horresco referens*) I did not in the least scruple to seize . . ." (*M*,382). *Horresco referens,* another cliché, is Aeneas's heightening parabasis during his description of the death of Laocoön (*Aeneid,* II,204), a death which the Trojans initially construed as a divine punishment for Laocoön's sacrilegious piercing of the wooden horse in order to see what was inside, while his fellow-Trojans stood back in disapproval, believing the mendacious Greek assertion that the gift was a sacred object (devoted to Pallas, goddess of art, needless to say). Laocoön, then is also our protagonist, who, equally desirous to pierce the impressive idol's façade, like the Trojan priest discovers the idol to be a lie, and thus, quite accurately, establishes the horror of reference.

What, then, are the implications of this double linguistic destabilization for a text whose narrator expresses the wish to be "plain, positive, peremptory—as short as pie-crust—as concise as Tacitus or Montesquieu" (*M*,388)?

Aut aliquis latet error (*Aeneid,* II,48). "There was something, as it were, remarkable—yes, *remarkable,* although this is but a feeble term to express my full meaning—about the entire individuality of the personage in question" (*M*,378). As we have seen, the central question of "The Man that was Used Up" is that of comprehending this "remarkableness" in terms that are less "feeble," "in explicit terms" (*M*,386). At the end of the quest, the riddle appears to be solved: what made the General so exceptional is the fact that he is "used up." This conclusion may be satisfactory to the narrator/protagonist; for a reading of his text as literature, it is manifestly deficient.

The problem can be sketched as follows: We have seen that the used-upness of the General can be understood as a consequence of his representation in the discourse of others. This would mean that the artificial man with the alliterative name and the abecedarian initials is an allegory of the subject in language, which is always the language of the other. Words, then, are prostheses that can never fully replace their "original" object, and identity is used up when it is represented by a linguistic surrogate—as it always is. This, however, poses a crucial problem, for in order to reveal this insight, Poe's text has to undermine its own logic: it has to repre-

sent the *result* of the representing act of revelation as the *cause* of the mystery motivating the act of revelation itself. And through this decisive metalepsis, the text renders itself unreadable; if the erosion of the individual by representation is the text's theme, then that text cannot thematize the result of that erosion as the mysterious difference causing the quest in which the text dramatizes its theme. Nevertheless, the text reads that the used-upness of the General is the answer preceding the question causing this used-upness. In addition, this answer cannot *be* an answer: for what is "remarkable" about Smith is that he is used up through representation, which can hardly be called remarkable, as such abrasion is a constitutive consequence of *any* representation. Whence, then, still this fascination? And what does it mean in a literary text?

In order to approach this question, I need a few largely precritical stepping stones. First, I assume that the desire to enter into a relation with the identity of the other depends on its being challenged by its imminent "failure." This failure, however, is not a deplorable lack or gap, but signifies a transcendence in what appears to be immanent. In other words: that which eludes us in the object of desire is the possibility-condition of desire itself. Second, by analogy, that which eludes our representation is constitutive for that representation: life is the non-representable origin of representation. But third, this cannot be unproblematically transposed onto representation as it figures in literature. For what fascinates us is indeed that which is transcendent *in* our complex contact with the real, and literature exists in a realm where this real is not absent or present in the same way as in our relation to a material reality of a non-linguistic kind. Our desire for the "real" other is directed by that in that other which transcends the language of our desirous thought—but in literature the object of representing desire is, it appears, *itself* a function of that representation. That which in literature ought to transcend representation does not have the transcendent reality which makes possible the desire for the other, yet that reality is an indispensable precondition of representing desire. The logical outcome of the paradox appears to be that literature is fatally impossible, that the literary language which cleaves it from the transcendent reality that enables representation, is doomed to annihilation from the moment of its conception. How then can literature still be possible? How can "The Man that was Used Up" exist, when its text must be constantly worried by questions like: "How can I be fascinated by something *because* it

transcends my representation insofar as this representation uses it up, when it is that same representation that *produces* that used-up-ness as the fiction enabling me to exist? How can the transcendence of the General's individuality fascinate me, when it is itself only ever a product of my own textual representation?"

All this, it should be noted, in the most anthropomorphic (and apparently Empsonian) terms—and that way error lies. For it is *not* the case that the text asks these questions *in this way*. What does happen is that it invites us to reflect upon these questions *and* upon the way we have insidiously ascribed them to a text transformed into a pathetically existentialist Narcissus arriving at paralyzing insights concerning his own literariness. And while these insights are not to be rejected out of hand, they do give rise to hypostatizations that ignore the text's literariness at the precise point where they pretend to articulate (under-stand) it. These insights, then, are no *mere* deluded mistakes, or errors, but they are not literature's last word. A renewed encounter between "Ligeia" and the General will enable us to pursue this.

The model of the machine. Both narrators, as we have seen, begin their story by confessing the imprecision of their memory. This, however, does not affect the entire memory of their idols: "There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the *person* of Ligeia. In stature she was tall. . . ." (*M*,311); "Upon this topic—the topic of Smith's personal appearance—I have a kind of melancholy satisfaction to be minute" (*M*,379). Both Ligeia and Smith are subsequently compared to and praised above the classic models of beauty and grace, Venus and Apollo (*M*,312; 379). It will be clear that the very convergence of the superlative terms employed to sketch their absolute (unparalleled) uniqueness is in itself already suspicious, but it is when we reach the *eyes* that the problem of the inefficiency of representation comes to the fore in full force.

"For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique" (*M*,312), Ligeia's lover tells us, and it is *consequently* in the eyes of his beloved that he senses the "strangeness" of her exquisite beauty. It is indeed important that we realize that it is the absence of a model that triggers the recognition of the unattainability of the object's transcendent reality. Models pertain to the symbolic order as criteria with which specific instances can be measured and represented in such a way as to shift the responsibility for representation onto

previous representations, thus masking in effect the impossibility of absolute representation. This imaginary efficiency of the model reminds us of the "original" efficiency of the cliché, and it is consequently no surprise that models do become clichés quite easily, as is the case in Poe. Yet, when the beauty of Ligeia's chin is described, the text already registers unease about these clichés, and instead of simply comparing that chin to Venus's, it has its narrator take recourse to an ekphrastic periphrasis: "I scrutinized the formation of the chin—and here, too, I found the gentleness of breadth, the softness and the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek—the contour which the God Apollo revealed but in a dream to Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian" (*M*,312).

But the *eyes* of Ligeia cannot be glossed even with manneristic allusions, and the absence of a model demystifies its imaginary success by opening up to the necessity of a transcendental excess. Just how this excess is to be understood in relation to *literary* representation is not yet clear; but we can already note the symptomatic evasion of the question the text subsequently traces by seeking shelter in a model of a different authority: "It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes" (*M*,313-14). Bacon's dictum referred to here reads, "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion," but Poe's text offers a slightly modified version earlier on:

> "There is no exquisite beauty," says Bacon, Lord Verulam, speaking truly of all forms and *genera* of beauty, "without some *strangeness* in the proportion." Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity—although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my perception of "the strange." (*M*,311-12)

"To trace home the perception of the strange"—this is perhaps the most pregnant formulation of the problem of the transcendent excess in literary representation, where "the strange" is, in a sense, always already "at home." But we have not yet arrived at the point where we can confront this thesis more directly.

Ligeia's eyes, then, incomparable and immeasurable, are of an ineffable "strangeness" which must, ". . . after all, be referred to the *expression*. Ah, word of no meaning!" (*M*,313). The text can do nothing more, save listing analogies to that "expression" which the

narrator recognizes in "the commonest objects," in the stars, in music, and, finally and inevitably, in a passage from a text:

> Among innumerable other instances, I well remember something in a volume of Joseph Glanvill, which (perhaps merely from its quaintness —who shall say?) never failed to inspire me with the sentiment: "And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will." (*M*,313)

This quotation, which also serves as the text's epigraph, and part of which is repeated twice by Ligeia, in the throes of death, first shrieking, then murmuring, has not been found in Glanville's writings—even though the text explicitly ascribes it to this Cambridge Platonist on three occasions. We shall suggest why this might be so later on—here, it will suffice to refer to another quotation from Glanvill (this time a real, albeit modified, repetition) Poe uses as epigraph for "A Descent into the Maelström," and the traces of which in Ligeia's eyes are self-evident now:

> The ways of God in Nature, as in Providence, are not as *our* ways; nor are the models that we frame any way commensurate to the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of his works, *which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democritus.* (*M*,577)[10]

The eyes of Ligeia's opposite number also have their incommensurabilities: "Either of such a pair was worth a couple of the ordinary ocular organs. They were of a deep hazel, exceedingly large and lustrous; and there was perceptible among them, ever and anon, *that amount of interesting obliquity which gives pregnancy to expression*" (*M*,379; emphasis added). The similarity to Ligeia's "strangeness" is unmistakable, but in the first version of the text Poe drove the strange even more forcibly home, by endowing Smith's ocular organs with ". . . that amount of interesting obliquity which gives force to the pregnant observation of Francis Bacon—that 'there is no exquisite beauty existing in the world without a certain degree of *strangeness* in the expression' " (*M*,313,i). It is more than evident now that "Ligeia" and "The Man that was Used Up" struggle with the same problems—the disconcerting ease with which Poe manages to juggle the terms of his pregnant observations in accordance with demands of matter rather than of meaning admirably summarizes this. In addition, it

remains an interesting point that both texts have recourse to one of the "fathers" of empiricism to *prove* the existence of an unnameable excess—even if they see themselves forced to manipulate the evidence in doing so. Again, the suggestion of a paralyzing artificiality at the core of literary representation seeking to remedy this evil through an external authority is brought home.

"Paralyzing" may, however, not be the right term—for in both texts an intense violence is mobilized. In "The Man that was Used Up" this is fairly obvious, but "Ligeia," too, carries traces of a relentless, mutilating artificialization. As Lawrence put it: ' "Her marble hand" and "the elasticity of her footstep" seem more like chairsprings and mantelpieces than a human being. She was never quite a human creature to him. She was an instrument from which he got his extremes of sensation. His *machine à plaisir,* as somebody says.'[11] That "he" is for Lawrence, as we have seen, Poe himself—and the question is consequently whether Lawrence has not been led astray. For the fact that in "Ligeia" 's "companion piece" Poe introduces a "real" (soft) machine which bears a remarkable resemblance to this *machine a plaisir* allows us to suspect that Lawrence's remark, which was apparently meant to be critical, misses its mark. But even abstracting from Smith, Lawrence can be argued to have, appropriately, had his leg pulled: Ligeia *was* never quite a human creature—that is the whole painful point. As figure of fiction, she is doomed to remain, in the words of Hélène Cixous, a "poupée de phrases."[12] The strength of Poe's text consists precisely in its impressively subtle deconstitution of the deceptive myth of the transformation of the other into literature, and it succeeds in doing so by demonstrating that the aestheticization of reality into represented intelligibility involves a considerable deployment of totalizing violence, a recuperation of that reality into an order which is alien to it and consequently negates it. It is in her lover's attempts to enclose her in his representation, in his desire to eradicate her mystery and to aestheticize it into intelligibility that Ligeia is used up, up to the point where her lover can legitimately claim that her beauty ". . . passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine" (*M*,314). The obsessive urge to possess the fullness of what fascinates inevitably engenders paroxysms of brutal violence, resulting in a devastating negation of the other, in a transformation of that other into a machine, or a marionette—"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, / Dead perfection, no more; nothing more."

We encounter anew the now familiar paradox: on the one hand, we have a text that stages the consequences and rigorous insatiability of an obsessive representational urge; on the other hand, the literary character of that text appears to imply that that text is itself a representation which has to succeed, for reasons of thematization, in representing that which escapes the representation of its narrator/protagonist *as* the non-representable. At this stage, we can begin to grope our way toward a level on which to approach this recurrent problem slightly less obliquely.

The Triumph of Death (Life, and Literature). We saw that in "The Man that was Used Up" the answer to the question of the transcendent excess in literary representation announced the possibility of a narcissistic dead-end at the heart of literature. Smith's mysterious attraction—"the remarkable something," as the narrator puts it, or, in a cliché he purloins, felicitously, from Bossuet's *Sermon sur la mort,* "the odd air of *je ne sais quoi*" (*qui n'a plus de nom dans aucune langue*)—is caused, or so the text appears to tell us, by his used-upness, by his artificiality, and the narrator expresses his satisfaction with this solution, thereby revealing himself to be a very poor reader.

In contrast to the later story, "Ligeia" sustains the unbearable tension of the possible impossibility of literature to the very end—and beyond. We suggested that the disease that undermines Ligeia can be read as an allegory of her lover's totalizing passion, and that this passion in turn can be an allegory for the menace of a literary representation unleashing itself towards a shattering collision with the hyperreflexive insight into its own impossibility. Hence, Ligeia's terrible agony coincides with the moment where writing apparently begins to destroy itself—as Georges Poulet wrote, "chez Poe . . . la mort du poème est atrocement matérielle."[13]

> The wild eyes blazed with a too—too glorious effulgence; the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave, and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion. I saw that she must die—and I struggled desperately in Spirit with the grim Azrael. (*M*,316)

It is in this desperate combat that Ligeia finally dies—*by* this desperate struggle she, a female Fortunato, is incarcerated in the language of her lover, who even "now," in his stubbornly interiorizing *in memoriam,* persists in fettering his beloved in his impetuously swelling and sinking figures.

> I groaned in anguish at the pitiable spectacle. I would have soothed—would have reasoned; but in the intensity of her wild desire for life—for life—*but* for life—solace and reason were alike the uttermost of folly. . . . Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length recognized the principle of her longing with so wildly earnest a desire for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away. It is this wild longing—it is this eager vehemence of desire for life—*but* for life—that I have no power to portray—no utterance capable of expressing. (*M*,317-18)

This morbid, insistent emphasis on personal impotence veers into classical narcissistic self-torture: the narrator's stuttering lament suggests that he is less fascinated by what is transcendent in the other than by his own inability to reduce that transcendence to his discourse, less concerned with the *something* beyond representation than obsessed with its being beyond *his* representation. And in this totalizing obsession, the object of desire is irrevocably doomed—such is the literary crisis "Ligeia" articulates: the deadlock of a wholly self-reflexive literature trapped in the negativity of the insight into its own incapacity to represent what must be absent from it. But does (can) literature exist on the terms of such a closed constellation? Let us rephrase this:

> My memory flew back (ah, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug) I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be forever?—upon the earth. (*M*,323)

"The beloved, the august, the beautiful . . . the entombed." How seriously can we take all this? Is there not room for the apparent indiscretion of suspecting a superb (dramatic) irony here? Dramatic: for it is imperative that we recognize that this irony does not smugly reject the predicament pervading the *text* but is directed primarily at the *narrator's* impassioned blindness to the incongruity of his own prosthetic discourse, which pretends to recall the *de*parted *be*loved from the *en*tombment it simultaneously re-enacts. It is this internal contradiction that we find acutely allegorized in

the correspondence of texture between the narrator's monomaniac interiorizations and the decoration of the "cursed" turret chamber he affects after Ligeia's death, which consists primarily of a heavy tapestry " . . . spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black" (*M*,322).[14] And it is in these suffocating surroundings, infected by signs that can only refer to themselves, that Ligeia's sign-infested memory is ravenously recollected and consumed. This chamber, and the desolate nature around it, the narrator attempts to replenish with the name of his beloved, as if that quotation from Homer, from Virgil, from Milton, could save her from this obsessive *cento*.[15] As if there would still be hope for a text which always and only encounters itself, and which incorporates the authority of other, even "non-existent" texts to found its belief in the existence *outside* those texts and hence outside its own representation of its own possibility-condition. The fact that Rowena (who, incidentally, is a quotation from *Ivanhoe*) has to succumb to this hypertrophic textuality too is no surprise. In the compulsively renewed tomb of the unforgotten Ligeia, there is no room for a living successor. No other can challenge this representation unpunished.

Everything seems to suggest that we have indeed arrived at the point where literature renders itself impossible. Time and again we get stuck on the insight that the other eluding and enabling representation is never other, that "the strange" is always already "at home," imprisoned in the madness of a closed system of signs —the supreme horror being that the text's increasingly frequent attempts to break through its own ramparts can only shore them up.

This point, then, might be said to announce the death of, and the entry of death in, literature. But it is no endpoint. What, then, is the meaning of this point? Where is the death of, and death in, literature readable, if that death is no endpoint? What, in other words, does Mallarmé's epitaph for Poe mean—"Que la mort triomphait dans cette voix étrange!"?

Ligeia's "death" cannot be an answer here, for she returns, and this return, effected in and through the text that killed her, counters the triumph of death in that text. What is more, she returns, precisely, under the guise of the very focus of the transcendent excess the text aspired to even while negating it. The question we have to consider, then, appears to be the following: How is it

possible that a text which has so violently demonstrated the radical impossibility of the "return" of the transcendental in a realm where it can never be, and never has been present, except as the empty fiction of a fallacious representation, nevertheless succeeds in affirming that very return? How can a text both stage the triumph of death and confirm the life of the transcendent other?

To these questions there is no answer, since their premises are incorrect. For it is not the case that the absence from fiction of the enabling transcendence of the object burdens literary representation with the impossible task to produce that transcendence in and for itself, even though a recognition of this burden is indispensable for an attempt to read the text as text. Such a conception in fact presupposes a language which absolutely obeys the lucid negativity of the consciousness that "uses" it and subjects itself to its radical meaninglessness in such auto-coincidence—and it is in that *presupposition* that death carves out its tomb, it is in that anthropomorphized language that the unlanguage of death flowers into the absolute narcissism ordaining the impossibility of literature. But language coincides as little with consciousness as it does with reality, and consequently cannot be destroyed in that consciousness's retreat into its own negativity. On the contrary, the moment consciousness folds back upon itself in the destructive insight into the rigorous unattainability of its possibility-condition, language undoes this deadly enclosure and *posits* an uncontrollable transcendence "for itself." Again, such convenient anthropomorphisms should not lead to a conception of this positionality in voluntaristic terms; it is not a function of the volition of a subject, textual or otherwise, but the irresponsible and violent negation of the absolute control of any subject over itself and "its" language. Where we spoke earlier about the possible impossibility of literature, we now have to allow for its impossible possibility, of which we can only say that it *is,* radically removed from any consciously controlled legitimation. And if "Ligeia" 's narrator's obsession with his own impotence was an allegory of the threatening dead-end of a literature that has shed its naïveté, then Ligeia's impossible return offers us the allegory of the compulsive and impersonal dissolution of that dead-end.

Is there then no triumph of death in this strange writing? Let us turn to Poe's unpalatable poem rewritten by Ligeia shortly before her death, and which she asks her lover to recite "at high noon of the night in which she departed." This poem portrays human exis-

tence as a tragedy: "the Conqueror Worm" its ultimate hero, and human beings, "Mimes, in the form of God on high," "mere puppets" chasing a Phantom "Through a circle that ever returneth in / To the self-same spot," who are, in due course, devoured by "A blood-red thing that writhes from out / The scenic solitude!" (*M*,319). This representation of reality as a gruesome tragedy appears to enforce the triumph of death as conqueror, yet this confirmation can only be staged at the expense of, precisely, death. For death is nothing, save what cannot be thought, and the almost comical introduction of a bloody writhing worm sporting vermin fangs imbued in human gore can, in all its cliché'd seductiveness, only confirm this. That the personification—or vermification—of the unthinkable is standard reconciliatory practice has been sufficiently argued—what must interest us here is that this strategy obeys the same principles that dictate the literary representation thematized in the text. Ligeia's poem is an abysmal reflection of/on the text's drama: in her lover's disremembering, she has indeed become a "mere puppet" (of phrases), while it is the narrator who chases a Phantom through a circle of representation that ever returneth in to the selfsame spot. But there is one important difference: Ligeia returns, and with that return, her poetic representation of the tragedy of life is unmasked as the consolatory, because intelligible delusion it is. As Paul de Man once put it, in a diction remarkably reminiscent of Poe: "For this is the real terror of death, that it lies truly beyond the reach of reflection."[16] It is its real terror, and its ultimate triumph "in" literature, in that literature can never contain it. Thus, Ligeia's return not only shatters the illusion that the text can destroy both her and itself through its incapacity to consciously represent her transcendental reality, but also the theatrical interiorization of death as intelligibility attendant on that illusion—and in this double deconstitution, the triumph of death in literature is rewritten as the absence of its presence therein.[17]

The triumph of life in "Ligeia" is the recognition that representation can never control the transcendent excess of the real; the triumph of death in "Ligeia" is the recognition that this impotence can never present itself *as* death; the triumph of literature in "Ligeia" resides in this text's supreme abandonment, in a maximum of control, to the uncontrolled language that postulates these triumphs of absence and, in the same gesture, allows for the transcendence of language itself, against the totalizing rule of the

deadly self-reflexivity of the closed system. And here one may begin to understand why the death of a beautiful woman (or man, for that matter) is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world, and why it is equally beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of the bereaved lover. Provided that we recognize that the eye of the text is not—never—a mirror.

The anamorphosis. A final and obvious question is how to reconcile all this to the observation that this complex allegory itself appears to be written or read by a literary consciousness. Does this not mean that we relapse into a narcissistic realm of self-reflexivity? And is the dramatic irony we read in the text not doubly ironical in that it is itself a reflection of its target's desire for control? To answer this question we ought to reflect on the proposition that we owe its formulation to a text whose mere existence renders a solution superfluous. For this question itself entails a narcissistic deadlock which is dislodged by the fact that the text *is* written, despite the presence of an insight into this dead-end in its unfolding. This points to a feature of literature we might call constitutive oblivion, the textual correlate of the violent positionality of language we touched upon before. Literature that moves up to the limits of its own impossibility, even up to the point where the impossibility of a non-deluded insight into the deluded character of that self-reflexive blockage threatens to petrify it, and which still manages to exist as an extremely—and therefore not absolutely—controlled writing, betrays a lucid vulnerability that preserves it from dissolution, and can indeed perhaps be circumscribed as a special form of the loss of self, in an active and necessary forgetting beyond self-reflexive rationality, but equally removed from a facile capitulation into irrationality.

As far as "Ligeia" is concerned, this oblivion can not only be read in the text's existence, but also in its later anamorphosis: "The Man that was Used Up" has certainly aided us in the formulation, no matter how *nachträglich,* of the irresolvable questions riddling the first text by manifestly distorting these questions and by desacralizing their pathos. Whereas in "Ligeia" the final word is never spoken—although its echo is always audible in the gap separating the last word of the protagonist ("LIGEIA") and the first word of the narrator ("I")—, "The Man that was Used Up" is precisely a sustained and rather irreverent parody of that unwritten word. But like every anamorphosis, it is a distortion *of* the other (image),

and in our reading mirror we have seen that the ultimate grotesque affirmation of the later text cannot cover the traces of the earlier arabesque aporia—in fact even foils it, especially in those points where the mirror forgets to reflect part of the example it constitutes.

What "The Man that was Used Up" forgets, for instance, is that the abrasion of the object in representation can never be the answer to the question of the transcendental fascination of that object in the literary text, but the readable locus of that blind spot in the text preserves it from foundering in the triviality it shamelessly flirts with. On the other hand, this triviality warns us that "Ligeia" cannot be wrapped up as an undisciplined piece of ("transcendentalist") Gothic mysticism that should not be subjected to rigorous interrogation: the apparent banality of the second text erodes the pedestal of the *monstre sacré* the first has become, and thus summons us to a rereading.

Perhaps this giddy anamorphosis of an irreducible undecidability in a relatively canonized masterpiece may partially account for the cavalier critical treatment "The Man that was Used Up" has received. Most readings of "Ligeia" might indeed be unpleasantly surprised if they caught a reflection of their own deliberateness in the deluded self-contentment of the narrator of that text's mirror. Supposing they would recognize this glimpse, of course, which is not very probable—and perhaps not even desirable, as we are not likely to run out of self-reflexive pathetics for quite a while yet. Ultimately, literary criticism, too, has to abandon itself to a forgetting "*upon the very verge* of remembrance" (*M*,314), and the present essay will have succeeded if it has succeeded in bearing witness to that truth.

> Der Professor der Poesie und Beredsamkeit nahm eine Prise, klappte die Dose zu, räusperte sich und sprach feierlich: "Hochzuverehrende Herren und Damen! merken sie denn nicht, wo der Hase im Pfeffer liegt? Das Ganze ist eine allegorie—eine fortgeführte Metapher!—Sie verstehen mich!—Sapienti sat!"[18]

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NOTES

1 Poe wrote several versions of "Ligeia" (first published in 1838) and of "The Man that was Used Up" (first published in 1839), and for both stories the largely definitive version was established in 1845. For this essay I have used the most

authoritative edition of Poe's writings to date, *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe. Volume II: Tales and Sketches 1831-1842,* Edited by Thomas Ollive Mabbott with the assistance of Eleanor D. Kewer and Maureen C. Mabbott (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978). References to this edition (*M,* plus page number) are inserted in the body of the text.

2 Mabbott mentions some of the textual convergences between both tales in his critical apparatus, but stops short of an elaboration of the problem. The only reading which offers a somewhat more extended (but still very superficial) comparison of these texts is, to my knowledge, G. R. Thompson, *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973) 83-85. Individual readings of "Ligeia" are legion—the interpretation closest to my own, but which I disagree with on a number of fairly important issues, is Hélène Cixous, *Prénoms de personne* (Paris: Seuil, 1974) 153-229. "The Man that was Used Up," on the contrary, has been rejected by the majority of the Poe-critics as trivial or even simply "incomprehensible" and hence unworthy of further study (see e.g. Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (First published 1941; New York: Cooper Square, 1969) 283, 399, 748). If the story is mentioned at all, this is usually only as part of an exercise in identifying historical and/or literary sources for Poe's work (cf. *infra*), and apart from Thompson, only Marie Bonaparte and Bertrand Rougé have, to my knowledge, devoted some more focussed attention to the tale (Marie Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytical Interpretation,* Foreword by Sigmund Freud. Translated by John Rodker. First published, in French, 1933 (London: Imago, 1949) 501-502. Bertrand Rougé, "La pratique des corps limites chez Poe: La vérité sur le cas de 'The Man that was Used Up'," in *Poétique,* XV:60 (Nov. 1984) 473-88). Bonaparte's reading is an amusing instance of "vulgär-Freudianismus"; Rougé's interpretation, which is indebted to Barthes's Poe readings, is in many ways compatible with that suggested in the present essay. After the completion of this essay, a recent monograph on Poe's epistemological concerns was brought to my attention, Joan Dayan's *Fables of Mind: An Inquiry into Poe's Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). The third chapter of this study, "Convertibility and the Woman as Medium," is especially stimulating for my own reading, but rather than making an attempt at mastering its excellence through incorporation, I have decided not to attune my reading to Dayan's (with which it is by no means at substantial odds), partially also because Dayan, too, refrains from reflecting "Ligeia" in "The Man that was Used Up", which is somewhat unfortunate as hers is an inquiry admirably sensitive to the issues this reflection can reveal.

3 Bonaparte, 227. One likes to imagine Nabokov reading this.

4 D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Phoenix Edition, first published 1924; London: Heinemann, 1964) 66.

5 *ibid.* 70.

6 Cf. Edward Wagenknecht, *Edgar Allan Poe: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963) 100, Daniel Hoffmann, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972) 198, and David Galloway in the introduction to the 1967 Penguin Poe, *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe: Poems, Tales, Essays, and Reviews,* edited with an introduction by David Galloway (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 15.

7 Cf. Hoffman, 197; Wagenknecht, 100; Thompson, 83; Galloway, 528; N. Bryllion Fagin, *The Histrionic Mr. Poe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1949) 147. See also *M,*377.

8 Bonaparte, 501-02.

9 Such as "prodigies of valor," "immortal renown," "fought like a hero," "a downright fire-eater, and no mistake," etc.

10 "The idea that Truth lies at the bottom of a well Poe may have found in the article on Democritus in Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (v. 39, London, 1819). It has been ascribed to Democritus on the basis of a fragment—'Of truth we know nothing, for truth is in the depths'—quoted by Diogenes Laertius (*Pyrrho,* Book IX, section 72) and others" (*M,*332,n.10).

11 Lawrence, 65. "Her marble hand" and "the elasticity of her footstep" are quotations from the portrait of Ligeia (*M,*311).

12 Cixous, 169.

13 Georges Poulet, *Les Métamorphoses du cercle,* préface de J. Starobinski (Paris: Flammarion, 1979) 304.

14 A *foot* is an appropriate unit here. Apart from this, Poe's "Philosophy of Furniture" obviously demands to be reread in this connection: "The soul of the apartment is the carpet. From it are deduced not only the hues but the forms of all objects incumbent . . . Touching pattern—a carpet should not be bedizened out like a Riccaree Indian—all red chalk, yellow ochre, and cock's feathers. In brief—distinct grounds, and vivid circular or cycloid figures, *of no meaning,* are here Median laws. The abomination of flowers, or representations of well-known objects of any kind, should not be endured within the limits of Christendom. Indeed, whether on carpets, curtains, or tapestry, or ottoman coverings, all upholstery of this nature should be rigidly Arabesque" (*M,*497-98).

15 "La fonction des clichés, comme des noms propres, dans leur statut de *citation,* est donc de nous forcer à réfléchir l'*arbitraire* du signe, qu'ils mettent en évidence, en dénonçant du même coup l'illusion réaliste et référentielle." Shoshana Felman, *La Folie et la chose littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1978) 167.—"Title: The name is the feminine (λιγεῖα) of the Homeric Greek adjective *ligys* (λιγύς), meaning canorous, high-sounding, clear-toned, or shrill. It was used as the name of a spirit in "Al Araaf," II, 112, whom Henry B. Hirst, writing under Poe's supervision in the *Saturday Museum,* March 4, 1843, explained as a 'personification of music.' The name Ligēa was borne by a dryad in Vergil's *Georgics,* IV, 336, and this is probably the significant connection in Poe's poem. It was also the name of a siren, mentioned by Milton, *Comus,* line 880, and in the story this may be in Poe's mind" (M,330-31). A further strikingly appropriate connection is the Latin *elegia* (Greek ἔλεγος, a lament). We cannot pursue the problem of the proper name at greater length here, although its study in the present context promises to be very fruitful. The relation to the onomastic games in "The Man that was Used Up" is very suggestive, especially so since Poe, two years before "Ligeia," in his parody of "chirography," *Autography,* already introduced a character with (shifting) alphabetical initials, and this in a burlesque in which, once again, the question of identity takes pride of place. See also the surprisingly "serious" revisitation of the *Autography* in "A Chapter of Autography" and "An Appendix of Autographs" (1841-42) (cf. *M,*259 ff, and, for the revisitations, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe. Volume XV: Literati—Autography,* Edited by James A. Harrison. With Textual Notes by R. A. Stewart. Reprint of 1902 New York Edition; New York: AMS Press, 1965).

16 Paul de Man, "Time and History in Wordsworth," in *Diacritics,* 17:4, (Winter 1987), 4-17; 9.

17 "Curiosity killed the cat," Lawrence suggested. But this death does not allow itself to be written; the stress in Poe's work on the return from the dead (i.e. the retreat of death *from* the text) is more than a facile horror motif, and the fact that Poe cannot let it rest at one representation only is far from being a symptom of "imaginative poverty," as some would have it. Curiosity killed the

cat, but as, among others, "The Black Cat" invites us to read, the cat *always* returns.

18 E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," in *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978) 331-63; 360. "Was sind Worte—Worte!—Der Blick ihres himmlischen Auges sagt mehr als jede Sprache hienieden" (358). "Erstarrt stand Nathanael—nur zu deutlich hatte er gesehen, Olimpias toderbleichtes Wachsgesicht hatte keine Augen . . . 'Ihm nach—ihm nach, was zauderst du?—Coppelius—Coppelius, mein bestes Automat hat er mir geraubt—Zwanzig Jahre daran gearbeitet—Leib und Leben daran gesetzt—das Räderwerk—Sprache—Gang—mein—die Augen—die Augen dir gestohlen.—Verdammter—Verfluchter—ihm nach—hol mir Olimpia—da hast du die Augen!'—Nun sah Nathanael, wie ein paar blutige Augen auf dem Boden liegend ihn anstarrten, die ergriff Spalanzani mit der unverletzten Hand und warf sie nach ihm, dass sie seine Brust trafen" (359). "Nathanael blieb plötzlich wie erstarrt stehen, er bückte sich herab, wurde den Coppelius gewahr und mit dem gellenden Schrei 'Ha! Sköne Oke—Sköne Oke,' sprang er über das Geländer" (362).

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